

There is something extremely captivating to the imagination in the thought that these venerable trees have witnessed the first rearing of the noble edifice, on whose ruins they seem to look in sympathetic decay. They may be imagined as addressing them—

“O, our coevals, remnants of yourselves!”

indeed, every thing connected with them is calculated to awaken the fancy of the poet and the painter, and the reflections of the moralist.

In going from Pately Bridge towards Ripon, about three miles from the latter place, there is a road across the fields, which leads the pedestrian through a sequestered burial-ground belonging to a small chapel, into a retired and beautifully wooded lane; at the bottom of which he is brought into full view, all at once, of Fountains' Abbey, which, by this simple route strikes much more powerfully on the feelings, than when gradually approached by the more formal walks through the pleasure grounds of Studley. From the moment of beholding these magnificent ruins, the spectator must be rapt in delight; now tracing the remains of the Abbey, its nave, its transept, its cloisters, now turning to enjoy the sweetly solemn effect of the general scene. The Ash and Birch enliven by their light foliage the dark masses of shade thrown out by groups of Fir, Larch, and Oak: the cliffs that rise around appear like natural walls, affording a delightful variety of tint, and shaded by ancient trees, whilst the tender saplings spring from between the crevices. Part of the cloisters stretches over the Skell, which murmurs responsive to the scene; the arches cast a deep and dark reflection on the water, whilst about the ruins wave lofty trees, tipped with light foliage, which is also seen peeping in at the narrow pointed windows, as they reflect the light from each other. Opposite to this secluded spot is a small recess in the rocks, by speaking from which a clear echo is returned in a few seconds, as if it floated along the ruined choirs and vaulted passages of the roofless abbey. Inexpressibly interesting are these aerial sounds to the imaginative ear! It should seem as if the spirits of the cowed brethren still loved to linger in the haunts so dear to them whilst they were in a state of mortal existence—still loved to keep up a link of association with those who, themselves “warm in life,” may have been treading just before on the ashes which, at the sound of human footsteps, again glowed with their wonted fires. It did indeed seem the voice of past ages:

“Vox et preterea nihil.”

but how eloquent the response which calls up the scenes and actors of so long a train of centuries gone by! It is such thoughts as these that invest the venerable Yew Trees, the silent witnesses of the changes of time and the decays of nature, with so much interest, and renders their preservation so desirable. They do not, however, appear to be treated with the reverence due to them; a low wall hides their weather-beaten boles on the side whence they would otherwise be seen to the most advantage; and a paltry little stable is erected almost beneath their branches, on which, worst injury of all, the marks of the despoiling axe are but too visible, and the ground underneath is strewn with fragments of larger limbs, probably torn away for petty purposes, to which meaner wood might have been applied with equal utility.

PLATE XXII.—THE GREAT ASH AT WOBURN.

THE Ash, from the lightness of its foliage, the graceful sweep of its branches, and the silvery appearance of its stem, has been called the Venus of the Forest; nor is it less admirable for utility than for beauty, as there is no timber, excepting that of the Oak, that is more generally in use. It is extremely profitable to the planter, as it will grow well in almost any soil, but its shade is accounted unfavourable to vegetation; and as it casts its leaves early, and displays them late, it is less desirable for avenues and pleasure-grounds; though, when it is in fine foliage, there is no tree more beautiful.

The Great Ash at Woburn stands in the Park of His Grace the Duke of Bedford, about a quarter of a mile from the mansion, and is an extraordinary specimen of the size which this tree will attain in favourable situations. It is ninety feet high, from the ground to the top of its branches; and the stem alone is twenty-eight feet. It

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